

Frequently Asked Questions for the Four-County Sampling

Q: What is happening?

A: As part of ongoing beach monitoring the Refugio Response Unified Command (UC) is coordinating beach tar ball sampling for Santa Barbara, Ventura, Los Angeles and Orange counties over the next two days. Sampling experts for the UC along with county representatives and non-governmental organizations (NGO) will participate.

Q: Is this something new?

A: This collaborative sampling is a continuation the response sampling plan and will provide a reference point for the monitoring and maintenance of beaches in the region. Sampling will be done using standard procedures for consistency.

Q: Where are you taking samples?

A: Tar ball samples will be collected at a variety of locations from Gaviota Beach in Santa Barbara, along the coast to Newport Beach in Orange County.

Q: Why are samples being taken?

A: Southern California has a number of natural seeps. The Refugio oil spill occurred in a natural seep area. In order to ensure that cleanup is complete, a monitoring and maintenance plan has been put in place. This round of sampling will help in effectively monitoring beaches and provide a “snapshot” of beaches in the area.

Q: How many samples are being taken?

A: Multiple samples will be taken from a variety of locations from Gaviota Beach in Santa Barbara to Newport Beach in Orange County.

Q: When will the results be released?

A: Results typically take a few weeks to be processed. Results from this week’s sampling and other monitoring will be released publically and posted to www.refugioresponse.com when they become available.

Q: Is this sampling and monitoring special and just for the Refugio Spill?

A: No. Ongoing beach monitoring is one of many tools available to responders to ensure cleanup is complete. As each oil spill is different, this tool is applied when appropriate.

Q: Who is doing the sampling?

A: The samples are being collected by the Office of Spill Prevention and Response (OSPR) and splits will be given to the United States Coast Guard and the responsible party.

Q: What are you sampling for?

A: The tests will attempt to “fingerprint” the samples to determine if oil is from one of the natural seeps in the region, the Refugio spill, or other sources.

Q: Who designed the overall sampling plan and approved it?

A: Scientific experts from state and federal agencies participating in the response drafted the plan for the Unified Command to approve. Local and non-government organizational concerns were addressed as part of the plan.

Q: Why are the non-governmental organizations and local government officials here?

A: There is a strong community investment in the protection and recovery of Southern California beaches. This monitoring plan helps local government and NGOs ensure that cleanup meets their expectations.

Q: What will you do if the samples come back as Refugio oil?

A: Beaches with a positive match for Refugio oil will be reassessed to determine further cleanup needs.

Spill Background:

On May 19, the Plains Pipeline, Line 901 ruptured and spilled oil that flowed along a culvert to Refugio State Beach where it reached the Pacific Ocean. Responders established a Unified Command comprised of the US Coast Guard, the US Environmental Protection Agency, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife’s, Office of Spill Prevention and Response, Santa Barbara County Office of Emergency Management, and Plains All American Pipeline (the responsible party). At the height of the response, more than 1,400 were working in the field with several hundred at the Incident Command Post supporting the response effort. For more information on the incident, visit www.refugioresponse.com.